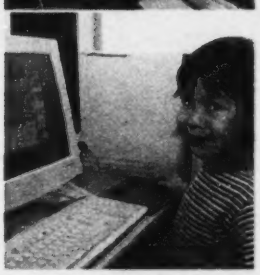
LiTERACY
more than words

PAN-CANADIAN INTERACTIVE LITERACY FORUM

Summary of Input on a Literacy Framework for Alberta



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1. INTRODUCTION

This document summarizes comments from 539 individuals on a literacy framework for Alberta, provided during the Alberta Literacy Forum held in Edmonton from April 14 to 16, 2008. The Forum was Alberta's contribution to the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) Pan-Canadian Interactive Literacy Forum, which involved all of Canada's provinces and territories holding fora in their jurisdictions to create a pan-Canadian dialogue on literacy. On Monday, April 14, Alberta participants spent the morning listening to speakers webcast from Vancouver and Toronto, including Ms. Adrienne Clarkson and Mr. Linwood Barclay. The afternoon focused on setting the stage and then seeking the views of Forum participants on what was important to improve literacy policy, programs and services in Alberta.

The afternoon began with learners (children and an adult) telling stories about their learning experiences. This was followed by presentations on literacy in Alberta. Mr. Keray Henke, Deputy Minister of Alberta Education, and Ms. Annette Trimbee, Deputy Minister of Alberta Advanced Education and Technology, provided an Alberta context for participant discussions on developing a literacy framework for Alberta.

2. SETTING THE STAGE FOR DEVELOPING A LITERACY FRAMEWORK FOR ALBERTA

Mr. Keray Henke welcomed participants by framing 21st Century Literacy as multifaceted – "literacy means acquiring, creating, connecting and communicating meaning in a variety of contexts." He spoke of the importance of emergent technology and innovative thinking in literacy, and said, "Our job as educators is to help students find their passion. Once they have done that, they become drivers of their own success." He discussed the need to explore teaching styles for developing literacy skills that help students understand the link between literacies and success in life. Alberta's student performance in the Programme for International Assessment (PISA) ranked first in Canada, and with this success in mind, Deputy Minister Henke emphasized the need to seek continuous improvement and prepare for the future. He spoke to the goal of having students with skills to understand the world around them, create meaning, and engage in life long learning opportunities. He challenged stakeholders to take a look at Alberta's view, vision and values, as well as what the province is working towards, and to provide insight to shape the direction of literacy in this province.

Deputy Minister Trimbee opened by acknowledging the diversity of partners present who shared the value of life long learning. She provided the context for adult literacy in Alberta. Ms. Trimbee highlighted the range and number of adult literacy programs in the province that served over 200 communities and 30,000 learners in 2006. She noted that the two key Government of Alberta strategies that form the basis for continuing work in adult literacy are *Building and Educating Tomorrow's Workforce* and *A Learning Alberta*. Both strategies acknowledge that Alberta's future "depends increasingly on our ability to ensure that all Albertans have the opportunity to reach their full potential to contribute to the economy and their communities." She emphasized that

literacy is complex, life long and that everyday demands of literacy are always changing. She provided the examples of text messaging and online banking. Citing the recent International Adult Literacy Skills Survey, which found 40% of adults in Alberta do not have sufficient skills to meet everyday demands in our society, Ms. Trimbee challenged Forum participants to build on our good work in early learning, K-12, post-secondary, community education and workforce programs. "We clearly need to be doing better to improve opportunities for the 1 million adult Albertans to improve their literacy competencies up to level 3 (roughly high school equivalency), and to encourage all adults to use their skills daily to increase and sustain our skills at the higher levels." She closed by inviting Forum participants to shape the vision, values and goals for a "literacy for all ages" Alberta framework.

Presentations from the two Deputy Ministers were followed by six speakers who shared their vision for how literacy could be improved in Alberta. The six speakers spoke from First Nations, Francophone, school board, community literacy, post-secondary and employer perspectives. Following these presentations, Forum participants worked at their tables to respond to questions in a Forum Workbook.

3. THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

539 participants were assigned to 78 tables. Two of the tables were Francophone, and the remaining tables grouped individuals by geographic region and a cross-section of the sectors represented at the Forum: Kindergarten to Grade 12 (K-12), community learning, post-secondary and employers. The numbers of Forum participants by sector and role is included as Appendix A.

Each participant had a Forum Workbook that provided background information (included as Appendix B) and a proposed definition, vision, values and outcomes to guide literacy in Alberta. The proposed components of the framework appear in boxes below. Each table selected a recorder who summarized each table's participants' responses to questions in the workbook. Facilitators were available to assist and respond to questions. The summary of responses is taken from the written responses submitted from each table.

4. SUMMARY OF RESPONSES

4.1 A Definition of Literacy

The following proposed view of literacy was presented in the Forum Workbook:

> Literacy is not simply the ability to read and write but is the full range of competencies that allow individuals to think critically, communicate effectively and solve problems in a variety of contexts to achieve their personal goals, develop their knowledge and potential and participate fully in society. The development and retention of literacy competencies is also life long.
>
> A comprehensive literacy framework recognizes the early experiences at home that contribute to oral language and literacy development, the foundational competencies for literacy built through the K-12 system and the need for adults to have opportunities to develop and build on their foundational literacy competencies.

There was general agreement on the definition. Some suggestions for improvement were:

- The use of the term competencies is unclear and needs to be defined.
- Multiple literacies should be included such as digital and social literacy and the ability to synthesize information.

4.2 A Vision for Literacy Development in Alberta

The Forum Workbook presented a potential vision statement:

> All people in Alberta have opportunities to develop and expand their literacy competencies to participate fully and successfully in living, learning, and work.

Again, there appeared to be general agreement with the vision statement, with some tables providing the following suggestions for improvement.

- The concept of literacy as a life long continuum needs to emphasized, in particular early childhood development beginning at birth and literacy development for Seniors. Add "life long learning". Put more emphasis on the theme: "Never too early, never too late".
- The vision statement needs to be more proactive and speak to more than providing opportunities but ensuring that individuals increase their literacy skills regardless of income, geographic location and other circumstances.
- The vision must be responsive to community and culture. In particular, it should honour the languages and cultures of First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) populations, Francophone and new immigrants.
- The vision needs to have a definable target and commitment to raise literacy to a certain level by a certain date.

4.3 Values

Participants were asked to comment on the following potential values statements:

> Literacy policies, programs and services:
>
> - are based on shared responsibility and accountability,
> - acknowledge and value cultures, strengths, abilities and needs of individuals,
> - support innovation and excellence in teaching and learning,
> - are developed and implemented through open, honest, consistent and transparent processes.

Participants suggested that the literacy policies, programs and services also need:

- to be accessible and sustainable with funding, training and on-going professional development that evolves with need,
- to be dynamic and strategic in understanding and responding to the changing issues and needs of the social environment. They must also prepare learners to understand and think critically about the social environment,
- to be learner centered - to be flexible and have capacity to meet individual needs comprehensively. This involves addressing needs of learners at various levels, tailoring approaches to suit learning styles, minimizing the challenges of learning difficulties and disabilities, and valuing the worldviews of different cultures (FNMI, Francophone, and immigrant groups),
- to be committed to collaboration and partnerships that share resources and knowledge, strengthen learner connections, and increase public awareness,
- to acknowledge barriers for learners, partners, and delivery and commit to reducing these barriers to improve access for all people,
- to value the unique culture of First Nations, Métis and Inuit people and seek to collaborate in meaningful partnerships that validate and align with indigenous ways of knowing,
- add "life long learning".

4.4 Outcomes for a Literacy Framework

Participants were asked to comment on the following possible outcomes for a literacy framework:

> As a province, we are working towards:
>
> - programs and services that are inclusive and accessible to all Albertans,
> - all individuals developing and enhancing their literacy competencies,
> - education and training providers delivering quality literacy programs and services,
> - literacy development supported and sustained through partnerships, and
> - policies, programs and services that are designed to provide a continuum of literacy development.

Comments on the outcomes can be grouped into four themes. These four themes recurred consistently when participants were asked to identify barriers and solutions to achieving the literacy outcomes.

4.4.1 Public Awareness of Literacy

- We need to increase awareness that literacy is a continuum rather than a binary of being literate or illiterate.
- Having the media provide information along with a clear picture of the need for literacy services (such as International Adult Literacy Skills Survey statistics) would raise the value of literacy in society, inform people of opportunities and encourage a learning society.
- Increasing awareness often reduces stigma, and breaks down misconceptions that prevent learners from increasing their skill levels.

4.4.2 Resources

- Resources are needed to integrate a continuum of learning and create interventions where learners currently fall through the cracks.
- Resources are also required to support excellence in teaching, instruction and delivery, increase accessibility and meet the goals put forward by the framework.

4.4.3 Evaluation, Measurability and Accountability

Concrete goals with specific targets, timelines and common measures (qualitative and quantitative) are required to evaluate whether literacy is improving over time.

- There needs to be accountability - a discussion around what success means, how it is measured, and what happens with learners and programs when there is a lack of success.
- Government leadership was seen as necessary along with a requirement for annual reporting on progress.

4.4.4 Cultural Diversity

- It is crucial for the voices of cultural groups to be heard in this discussion.
- Diversity needs to be valued, respected and integrated into policies, programs and services.
- It is important to understand different world views and values in order to engage literacy learning with cultural sensitivity.

4.5 Key Challenges to and Solutions for Improving Literacy in Alberta

Forum participants were asked to identify challenges to and solutions for achieving each of the outcomes at a local or provincial level. There was significant consistency with five themes identified as important additions to the vision, values and outcomes being stressed again when participants identified challenges and solutions. These themes were:

- awareness,
- resources,
- coordination and partnerships,
- qualified instructors and volunteers, and
- definitions and standards.

4.5.1 Raising Awareness

The need to increase awareness of the importance of literacy was suggested as a missing outcome. As well, a key challenge and solution was the need to spread the word on the value and understanding of life long learning. Raising awareness of the current levels of literacy in Canada was also seen as helping potential learners to self-identify the need to pursue learning.

> We want literacy to be a mainstream buzzword, commitment and PRIORITY.

The early years are crucial and parents and families need to be encouraged as each child's first teacher. One table of participants suggested that the importance of early childhood development should be incorporated into high school education curricula citing the earlier success in reaching students with the message about Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. Another group suggested new parents should be provided with information on the importance of early literacy activities.

Groups noted that increased awareness provides an incentive for a learning society to strive for higher levels of literacy/education and creates communities that value life skills, staying current, and always growing to be responsive to societal, economic and political trends. Long-term maintenance of skills is important since skills are lost when not used – awareness of this may help motivate learners to keep pursuing literacy opportunities over their lifetime.

> We need to develop a culture of life long learning.

Other suggestions included:

- Increasing the understanding of the need for literacy because of its link to health, employment outcomes, safety and community participation may stimulate the engagement of those with limited literacy awareness.
- Employers need to be aware of the benefits of providing continuous learning to employees and recognize the importance of workplace literacy. Learners also need to know the benefits of improving their skills and the impact on their lives.
- Awareness of the full extent of learning opportunities and supports available and how to access these, both as a learner, and as a service provider, is crucial. This creates a learning pathway for learners, identifies gaps that may exist and creates a network of research, resources and support for service providers.
- Promotional and informational print and websites for literacy need to be written in plain language so that people who seek information and programming find it accessible.

Many tables of participants listed media campaigns on TV and radio as a solution to bring increased awareness to the public perception of literacy and the benefits of life long learning. These campaigns would also reach those who may not have strong reading skills and could share stories of people who can affirm that life long learning is possible for all.

> Provide community exemplars – success stories of those who changed their life through literacy.

- Several tables of participants also suggested that at the local level, local information gathering and dissemination could occur through a single organization or committee that catalogues services and develops strategies to disseminate information to schools, municipal and county offices, businesses, clubs, community and radio/media outlets.

4.5.2 Resources

The lack of financial resources was consistently raised as a barrier and the need for more financial resources was consistently raised as a solution to achieving all of the outcomes. A widespread view was that education should be valued and given priority through the provision of adequate sustainable funding.

> The proposed policy statements are good but need the funding to back them and make the programs and services come to fruition.

- A number of tables of participants wrote that they would like to see to see Community Adult Learning Council and volunteer tutor adult literacy service grant programs opened up for new applicants.
- Programs would like to increase their hours of availability and expand services and need the resources to do so.
- Non-profit groups are also struggling to offer competitive wages and benefits to qualified employees.

- Concern was raised that additional or pilot project funds are more available for new initiatives, which poses challenges to existing programs that are successful and desire continuity.
- Current funding restrictions that focused on at-risk or specific groups to the exclusion of others was seen as a challenge, the solution was to have universal programs.
- Fundraising arose in the table discussions as both a challenge and a solution to the need for more resources. Raising funds takes time away from program delivery.

4.5.3 Coordination and Partnerships

- Coordinating policies, programs and services was seen as a key solution to enabling inclusive, accessible programs and to having individuals developing and enhancing their literacy skills.
- Coordination prevents gaps and overlapping of services, and requires strong policy support as well as a clarification of roles and responsibilities.
- Awareness of services offered is crucial to cross-ministry work and effective program referrals.
- Communities need a single point of access that would be responsible for collecting and sharing all information on available learning opportunities.
- Community involvement and partnerships are crucial to creating inclusive and accessible services. Partnerships create common understandings and goals, more opportunities for dialogue between different groups, allow for sharing of innovative practices within regions, and reduce silos.

> K-12, post-secondary, adult education, and English Language Learning operate quite separately from each other. How do "we" bring "them" together in a meaningful way to explore possibilities for "new" partnerships?

4.5.4 Qualified Instructors and Volunteers

It was noted that ensuring that educators are prepared to teach literacy skills pre-Kindergarten, at all grade levels, and for adults is crucial. Though teachers are well prepared in most areas, literacy and ESL components should be added to education degrees along with a paradigm shift that acknowledges that all teachers are literacy teachers regardless of their specialty.

Ongoing professional development with teachers would ensure they are able to build student's literacy skills using a variety of methods that match learner needs. The ability to recruit and retain qualified teachers and instructors with expertise in literacy, cross-cultural competency and the use of technology was a widespread concern.

- Capacity for programming is largely dependant on finding qualified educators and this is a growing challenge, especially in rural areas. As well, staff retention is a challenge due to low pay.

- Volunteer training is also crucial as they provide a large portion of one-on-one literacy building opportunities for adult learners. Regional training opportunities for literacy tutors and other literacy volunteers will directly influence the quality of delivery. However, finding volunteers is becoming increasingly difficult.
- Professionalizing literacy instruction with accreditation could be valuable in creating accountability (standardized evaluation), increasing quality of delivery and attracting professionals to literacy careers.

Provide training that is consistent, credible and certified.

4.5.5 Common Definitions and Standards

It was suggested that more work was needed to define the continuum of literacy from early learning, K-12, post-secondary and community adult learning.

- A number of tables of participants suggested that government leadership was key to this, by having a continuum of learning reflected at the provincial level. Ministries and programs need to work together towards common goals, share information and opportunities. This would reduce duplication and overlap, create a more purposeful approach and link expertise and resources.
- Additionally, establishing benchmarks for literacy would allow for a common assessment process and feed the development of curriculum and lesson plans for use in a wide array of contexts.
- Improved assessment would assist in long-term planning, increasing accountability and creating more options for learners.

A detailed summary of challenges and solutions is included as Appendix C.

5. CONCLUSION

Forum participants were invited to send any additional comments following the Forum to **http://literacy.alberta.ca**.

At the Forum there was consensus among the 539 participants on the key components of what should be included in a literacy framework for Alberta and the solutions for improving literacy for all ages. The following key themes were stressed:

- There needs to be actions to increase the awareness of the life long view of literacy that encompassed early learning activities within families beginning with the birth of their children and continuing through to the senior years.
- Policies, programs and services need to be learner-centred, respectful and responsive to cultural differences.
- Resources are needed to expand programs and services, to hire and retain qualified staff and provide professional development to ensure that they remained qualified.
- Partnerships and collaborations are challenging to develop and maintain but are critical to ensuring access and transitions for learners.
- Accountability was stressed with the need for an overall literacy plan with clear roles and responsibilities, common literacy benchmarks and assessment tools, defined targets, measures and timelines with regular reporting on progress.

Many thanks to all the Forum participants for their thoughtful comments and suggestions on how to improve literacy policies, programs and services in Alberta.

APPENDICES

A. Alberta Literacy Forum Participant Numbers by Sector and Role

B. Excerpt from the Literacy Forum Workbook – Background Information for Discussions on a Literacy Framework for Alberta

C. Summary of Challenges and Solutions by Outcome

APPENDIX A

Alberta Literacy Forum Participant Numbers by Sector and Role

Sector/Role	Number
Adult Learner	50
Tutor	39
Board Member	31
Program Administrator/Coordinator/Instructor/Facilitator	192
Post-Secondary Representative	28
Employer/Workplace Program Representative	10
Teacher/Principal	56
School Jurisdiction Representative	44
Curriculum/Alberta Incentive for School Improvement (AISI) Coordinator	23
Trustee	10
Government	56
Total	539

APPENDIX B

Excerpt from the Literacy Forum Workbook – Background Information for Discussions on a Literacy Framework for Alberta

Background

Alberta has high quality K-12, advanced education and workforce development policies and programs. However, Albertans who are concerned about maintaining and improving our quality of life and economic prosperity have identified the need to develop a comprehensive literacy framework and action plan for Alberta.

The Alberta government's strategic plan includes a focus on the importance of having quality basic and advanced education, life long learning and human resource development to enable Albertans to be responsive, caring, creative, self-reliant and contributing members of society. Quality learning opportunities develop the learning, work and life skills Albertans need to achieve their aspirations and potential in our increasingly knowledge-based economy. The most basic of these skills include the ability to read, write and complete mathematical computations. These are the basic skills or building blocks for effective communication, further learning, problem-solving and active citizenship.

A coordinated literacy framework for Alberta, along with school-aged and adult literacy components contributes to a Pan-Canadian priority of the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC). Through the CMEC's Literacy Action Plan, ministers from each province and territory have committed to work together to increase the literacy levels of all Canadians through a number of actions including the development of literacy frameworks in each jurisdiction.

Alberta Government Context

A coordinated literacy framework will build on the strengths of our current K-12, advanced education and workforce development systems, and ongoing initiatives to enhance our education and training systems.

A Learning Alberta, Alberta's Commission on Learning and *the K-3 Numeracy/Literacy Report* identified the important role of early learning and the need to break the intergenerational cycle of low literacy/low socio-economic status by investing in family literacy and other parenting supports. A commonly cited reason for non-completion of high school is that students do not have the literacy skills to keep up with an increasingly complex high school curriculum. To address this, a key strategy to increase high school completion is the development of a school-aged literacy component of the literacy framework. The K-12 component will identify strategies that support literacy development across all subject areas in all grades.

The need to increase literacy and other foundation skills of adult Albertans was identified in *A Learning Alberta* and *Building and Educating Tomorrow's Workforce*. Both initiatives recognize that people are the shaping force in sustaining Alberta's economic performance and quality of life. There is a commitment to enhance access to education and training for groups

underrepresented in education and the workforce. This is occurring through initiatives to strengthen adult learning and literacy programs in communities, and to assist employers and industry associations to improve literacy and essential skills among employed Albertans. Life long learning and workforce policies and programs are key components in Alberta's literacy continuum.

Literacy is Complex, Life Long, Personal, Social and Economic

Discussions with K-12 and adult learning stakeholders and research have highlighted a number of themes important to our understanding of literacy.

Literacy is complex. In our knowledge-based society, literacy competencies extend beyond reading and writing to include extracting and critically analyzing information to solve problems in different situations. Literacy requirements also vary depending upon whether the setting is school, work, in the community, or another setting.

Literacy is life long. It is never too early and never too late to develop and continue to build literacy skills. Literacy skills need to be used to be maintained. As well, literacy requirements evolve with the continued introduction of new technologies.

Literacy has personal, social and economic benefits for individuals and society. Individuals with higher literacy skills have been shown to have better health, higher incomes, greater civic engagement, life long access to learning and reduced crime rates.

Literacy Development is a Shared Responsibility

Alberta's success in having a population with highly developed literacy competencies is dependent upon the commitment and collaboration of many partners:

- individual learners and their families,
- schools and school jurisdictions,
- community-based adult learning and literacy organizations and post-secondary institutions,
- employers and employee and industry organizations,
- community volunteers,
- public libraries and other organizations, and
- governments and other funding bodies.

Our vision is for a coordinated comprehensive approach that moves literacy development outside the traditional view of a classroom for children to one that involves individuals throughout their life stages and in families, communities and workplaces. We would like you to consider the role that you can play, individually, through your organization, in your community and with other partners.

APPENDIX C

Summary of Challenges and Solutions by Outcome

C.1 Challenges to and Solutions for Programs and Services Inclusive and Accessible and Having Individuals Developing and Enhancing Their Literacy Competencies

Challenges	Solutions
For Potential Learners	
Time arose as the most significant barrier since learners are often very busy with home life, work and trying to make ends meet. Pursuing learning opportunities is not a priority when juggling several responsibilities. Language and culture. Some ESL programs were limited to landed-immigrants, which was seen as a barrier for groups such as Canadian Citizens and temporary foreign workers who also need ESL training. Different cultural groups value learning differently and are thus more or less likely to enhance their literacy skills. Childcare, transportation and cost of programs. Low self-esteem and lack of confidence with the stigma associated with having poor literacy skills.	Engage employers in workplace literacy programs so that improving basic skills is integrated into activities learners are already involved in. Free translation and interpretation would assist in understanding what opportunities individuals would like to learn about and get involved in. Accountability needs to be put in place to ensure employers are following through on their agreements with temporary foreign workers to provide literacy and English language training. Provide on-site childcare and cover transportation costs. Make programs non-threatening, welcoming and a place of enjoyment and encouragement. Embed or infuse literacy instruction in all curricula, programs of study and content areas for all ages. Incorporate community mentors to assist, take learners to programs and help them build their self-esteem.
Gaps for Specific Learner Populations	
More funding is needed for pre-Kindergarten programming, adults with the lowest levels of literacy and special education, particularly for Grades 1–4 Residency requirements currently prevent newcomers from accessing services they need. Funding for English as a second language (ESL) often runs out before people can achieve literacy – this needs to be addressed.	Provide more funding to support families and parents in pre-Kindergarten family literacy programs, to reach adults with the lowest levels of literacy, and for special education. Provide GED exams and prep courses in each community. We need a body for the delivery and evaluation of preschool and adult programs in French for francophone populations.

Challenges	Solutions
Responsiveness to the Circumstances of Learners	
Programs should not block learners from returning to learning. Meeting learner needs requires the collaboration of many stakeholders and the voice of learners.	Programs and services must acknowledge that learners start at varying points. Programs must be tailored to meet individual goals. The diversity of learners requires flexible scheduling to fit around work and family, allow for multiple entries and exits, and address learning difficulties and different learning styles. Provide programs where people already gather.
Qualified Instructors	
Staff retention is a challenge due to low pay and many incentives to work elsewhere. Teacher training needs to be adapted to the specific needs of minority settings.	Professional accreditation or standards for literacy practitioners/instructors is required to ensure quality delivery. Pre-kindergarten professionals, K-12 teachers as well as university and college instructors need specific literacy training. Recruit qualified French personnel and pay them adequately.
Rural and Remote Communities	
Rural and remote communities have difficulty finding enough learners to run classes. Geographic distance poses barriers of accessibility, isolation, travel time, transportation, availability of child-care, and finding qualified instructors. Connecting learners in small or isolated communities continues to be a challenge.	Funding requirements need to be relaxed and focus on need rather than enrolment numbers to recognize that rural communities will have lower enrolment compared to urban centres. Community-based models such as Volunteer Tutor Adult Literacy Services improve accessibility but we need more of them and they need to be strengthened. School systems, community based programs and post-secondary institutions need to share learning and technology resources.
Access to Other Technology Resources and Libraries	
School libraries are under-supported but have great potential to increase support for reading. Lack of technology and the skills to use technology are affecting First Nations people in accessing tools and resources available on the internet and via videoconferencing.	Library memberships are an excellent way to access current and relevant materials, and this access would have huge positive impacts if available for free. Community, libraries and schools should share technology resources.

C.2 Additional Challenges to and Solutions for Having Individuals Developing and Enhancing Their Literacy Competencies

Challenges	Solutions
Learner Transitions	
An opportunity for communication between regions and service providers increases expertise, learnings from successes and failures, and awareness of best practices. We need to recognize various forms of learning other than the traditional classroom model.	All parties need to define their roles and responsibilities to create a continuum of learning. Supports and resources for children immigrating to Canada could be improved with a coordinated transition policy that addresses their English and other learning needs.

C.3 Challenges to and Solutions for Education and Training Providers Delivering Quality Literacy Programs and Services

Challenges	Solutions
Training and Ongoing Professional Development	
Recent university graduates are often recruited into tough teaching situations such as special needs and early childhood classes, where in fact, it may be most valuable to place highly experienced and skilled teachers. Lack of recognition and compensation for pre-Kindergarten and adult literacy practitioners. A trainer shortage.	Paid coaches, mentors or literacy consultants who assist with training and preparing others for delivering literacy programs would increase quality of teaching. Pre-Kindergarten and adult literacy instructors would benefit from professional recognition and increased salaries, thus building program capacity. Use technology to share human resources via video-conferencing.
Staff and Volunteer Recruitment and Retention	
Staff turnover rates are very high and this may be linked to staff being over worked, underpaid, and not offered enough on-going training and professional development. Hiring extra staff to relieve the heavy workload is often not possible due to budget constraints. Historical reliance on volunteers to fill needs is becoming unrealistic as volunteerism continues to fall.	Increase funding to address the compensation, benefits and professional development of staff, and to hire more staff. Allow volunteer hours to count towards tax credits and student loan deductions. Create a registry of literacy volunteers to coordinate volunteer resources.

Challenges	Solutions
Standards in Learner Assessment and Program Evaluation	
"Quality" needs to be defined. Currently there are no standard literacy benchmarks. Though standardization may improve transferability, it is important that forms of education continue to be flexible to learner needs and not only exist in the context of the traditional classroom model.	Use of a specific benchmarking tool such as International Adult Literacy Skills Survey and a provincial commitment to work towards a certain benchmarked level of literacy skills would create consistency. There needs to be common measures and standards of achievement so that learning is measureable and students can more easily transfer from opportunity to opportunity, knowing they operate with the same benchmarks. Standardized testing for adults would improve adult transferability between learning opportunities. Common assessment processes and tools would assist with long-term planning and help measure literacy outcomes. Ongoing research is crucial to literacy in defining best practices, understanding what is happening in the Canadian and international context and building proactive responses to changes in the social environment.

C.4 Challenges to and Solutions for Literacy Development Being Supported and Sustained Through Partnerships

Challenges	Solutions
Competition	
Competition for limited funds prevents sharing of information, creates inefficiency and wastes time and resources.	Government leadership is required to model and encourage partnerships by mandating agencies to work together and to hold organizations accountable for effective partnerships More funding and better communication.
Staff Retention	
High staff turnover precludes the building of relationships important for effective partnerships. Staff shortages, and tired and overworked staff makes it difficult to commit the time to partner	More funding to provide better compensation and more professional development opportunities. Co-locating organizations under the same roof.
Coordination and Referrals	
It is crucial that business is involved in education, in part by providing work-place literacy.	Employers could be encouraged through financial incentives and awareness of the benefits of employee learning on health, safety and increased productivity. Literacy centers in storefront locations could play a key role in referring learners to appropriate services in a common location. Cross-ministry collaboration and a strategy is crucial to create coordination and partnerships with regular reporting. Coordination of services on a broad scale would bridge transitions for learners between 0-K, K-12, post-secondary institutions and community programs, reduce duplication of services, and increase awareness of what is available to learners Coordination would also help partners to understand their responsibility in addressing literacy needs. Health care, libraries and other social service agencies have a crucial role to play in assisting learners and families with literacy needs.

C.5 Challenges to and Solutions for Policies, Programs and Services Designed to Provide a Continuum of Literacy Development

Challenges	Solutions
Define and Benchmark Literacy	
The lack of common definitions, benchmarks and standards prevents learner transferability and organizations working together to meet common goals.	Literacy-related organizations need to have a clearer assessment process to create accountability, responsibility and meaningful feedback on the successes and failures of initiatives..
Create Collaboration and Learner Pathways	
A continuum of learning needs to be available and affordable in each community from 0 to death. Learner pathways need to be established to enable learners to transfer between programs. Current assessment tools do not support this process since they are not standardized.	A continuum can be achieved through excellent partnerships, technology (video-conferencing and internet streaming), and local tutoring and training opportunities. Create a map or menu of services for literacy development could be developed to increase accessibility. A strong referral system, and communication and commitment among service providers. Improved assessment would assist in long-term planning, as well as assist in learner pathways
Specific Gaps in the Continuum	
Current K-12 and adult education systems prevent adults from crossing easily between these providers to attain a Grade 12 education. Families, pre-schools and daycares need to be engaged in early childhood literacy development and seniors need to have programs available. Literacy issues need to be recognized and addressed in the K-12 system. Special education funding needs to be sustainable throughout K-12. Emphasis needs to be placed on growing higher levels of literacy and increasing educational success at the Masters and PhD level. Immigrant professionals are falling through the cracks, and connections are needed to transfer their skills into the Canadian context. ESL immigrant literacy needs must be addressed.	

PARTNERS:

Alberta

Community Learning Network

Edmonton Regional Learning Consortium

Partners in adult learning for students' sake

Literacy Alberta

Council of Ministers of Education, Canada

Conseil des ministres de l'Éducation (Canada)

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